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ABSTRACT

In November 1994, directors of Alabama's 21 public library systems were surveyed to determine their experiences with, and opinions of, the 1988 "Standards for Public Library Service in Alabama." Replies were received from nine (34%) of the directors. Directors were provided with a list of 15 ways in which they might have used the system standards and asked to check all that applied. Seven directors reported that the standards were used to seek funding from alternate sources such as federal grants and foundations, while six directors (67%) reported they were used to improve bibliographic access to holdings of member libraries. Other uses included requesting an increase in local per capita support and library collection improvement (55%); improving services, evaluating, and accomplishing things not listed on the survey (44%); and increasing continuing education activities for member librarians and trustees (33%). A ranking is provided of standards identified as most and least helpful to at least two of the directors, and most and least helpful to member libraries. In response to a question asking directors to suggest areas for which system standards should be added, recommendation included outreach programs such as bookmobiles deposit stations, a books-by-mail; cooperative ventures; online information access; and new technology and automation. Of the nine possible ways in which directors help their member libraries use the standards, seven (78%) reported that they helped their member libraries use the standards to improve their collections, four (44%) to request a budget increase, change hours, or add to or remodel the facility, and three (33%) to evaluate and actually get budget increases. (MAS)

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PLAN YOUR EXCELLENCE: SYSTEM DIRECTORS' INPUT ON USE AND REVISION
OF STANDARDS FOR PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICE IN ALABAMA

In late November 1994, the directors of the state's 21 public library systems were surveyed to determine their experiences with, and opinions of, the 1988 Standards for Public Library Service in Alabama. Replies were received from nine (34%) of the directors.

Directors' Use of the 1988 Standards

The system directors were provided with a list of fifteen ways in which they might have used the system standards and asked to check all that applied. A sixteenth item was included for those who used the standards in ways not included in the list. One director checked none of these items, indicating that he had not used the standards, although he later listed five he considered helpful. Another explained, "None, because funding bodies know they are just suggestions."

The seven remaining directors reported that the system standards were used to seek funding from alternate sources such as federal grants and foundations, while six directors (67%) reported that they were used to improve bibliographic access to holdings of member libraries. Five (55%) used the standards to request an increase in local per capita support and to improve library collections. In four systems (44%) the standards were used to improve services, to evaluate, and to accomplish things other than those listed on the survey. In three (33%) they were used to increase continuing education activities for member

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librarians and trustees and to plan. Two directors (22%) used the standards to increase public relations assistance to, and consultant contacts with, member libraries. Only one director (11%) reported using the standards either to actually get an increase in local per capita support, increase annual children's and adult programming in member libraries, develop a plan for users with special needs, or increase system director's visits to member libraries or their attendance at member library board meetings. The additional ways in which the system standards were used are appended, along with the directors' explanations of how standards were used to improve their libraries' collections and services and how they were used in planning and evaluation.

Helpfulness of the System Standards

The directors were asked to list the numbers of the five standards they considered most helpful. Of the nine who returned surveys, all but one complied with this request; this director wrote "none." The numbers of standards considered most helpful by at least two (22%) of the directors responding to the survey are listed below. The standards are arranged in descending order, followed by the percentage and number of directors that considered each among the most helpful. The wording of these standards is supplied immediately below the list for easy reference, and the directors' explanations of their choices are appended.

Standard Number	6	44%	(4)
Standard Number	5	33%	(3)
Standard Number	13	33%	(3)
Standard Number	8	22%	(2)
Standard Number	15	22%	(2)
Standard Number	18	22%	(2)
Standard Number	21	22%	(2)
Standard Number	29	22%	(2)
Standard Number	32	22%	(2)
Standard Number	34	22%	(2)

- #6 An Alabama public library system will extend service to areas without library facilities in cooperation with member libraries.
- #5 An Alabama public library system will have local (i.e., not including state aid or federal funds) per capita support of at least 50 cents.
- #8 An Alabama public library system will coordinate regional library service by developing a written long-range plan of system service in cooperation with local libraries.
- #15 An Alabama public library system will assist local libraries to prepare grant applications where appropriate.
- #18 An Alabama public library system will visit each member library during the library's service hours at least quarterly.
- #21 An Alabama public library system will provide consulting service for local libraries in the areas of library planning and evaluation, reference, adult services, children's services, materials selection and weeding, and technical services.
- #29 An Alabama public library system will provide direct reciprocal borrowing among all member libraries.
- #32 An Alabama public library system will have access to a basic reference collection to provide back-up reference service. This reference collection will include 80% or more of the recommended titles on the APLS Reference List.

- #34 An Alabama public library system will provide bibliographic access to 80% of the holdings of system libraries, e.g. through union lists, on-line catalog, etc.

The directors were also asked to list the numbers of the five standards they considered least helpful. Seven of the directors did so, while an eighth wrote, "All standards were helpful-even if our system is currently not following all of them. They provide goals toward which to work."

The largest number of directors that chose any one standard as being among the least helpful was two. The numbers of these standards are listed in descending order according to the number of directors by which each was chosen, followed by the percentage and number considering each to be among the least helpful. The standards' wording is supplied immediately below the list, and the directors' explanations of their choices are appended.

Standard Number 3	22%	(2)
Standard Number 4	22%	(2)
Standard Number 5	22%	(2)
Standard Number 19	22%	(2)
Standard Number 26	22%	(2)
Standard Number 32	22%	(2)

- # 3 An Alabama Public Library System will collect signed system and member library board meeting minutes to be filed at system headquarters.
- # 4 An Alabama Public Library System will hold system board meetings at least bi-monthly.
- # 5 An Alabama Public Library System will have local (i.e. not including state aid or federal funds) per capita support of at least 50 cents.

- #19 An Alabama Public Library System will provide at least 10% of state aid received by the system in direct payment to member libraries.
- #26 An Alabama Public Library System will coordinate at least one children's and one adult system-wide programming series in local libraries annually.
- #32 An Alabama Public Library System will have access to a basic reference collection to provide back-up reference service. This reference collection will include 80% or more of the recommended titles on the APLS Reference List.

The directors were asked to suggest areas for which system standards should be added; only three did so. Areas suggested by these directors included: outreach programs such as bookmobiles, deposit stations, or books-by-mail; cooperative ventures; on-line information access; and new technology and automation.

Use of Public Library Standards with Member Libraries

The directors were asked to indicate which of nine possible ways they helped their member libraries use the standards for public libraries. A tenth item was included for those who helped member libraries use the standards in ways not included in the list.

Six of the directors checked more than one of these items; two checked only one but offered explanations. One of these directors explained that "good communications and specific assistance on particular problems seems to work best in this system." The other included a letter praising the standards as "a well planned and highly usable document containing realistic and logical goals which libraries should strive to obtain" and explaining their lack of use as "no reflection on the document

itself." This director is looking forward to using the standards with her member libraries in the future. The one director who did not check any of the items wrote, "none" and explained the reason as being that "the suggested levels & numbers are too low-too minimum."

Seven (78%) of the system directors reported that they helped their member libraries use the public library standards to improve their collections. Four (44%) helped member libraries use them to request a budget increase, change hours, or add to or remodel their buildings; three (33%) helped use them to evaluate and to actually get budget increases. In two systems, directors helped member libraries use the standards to plan and to accomplish things other than those listed on the survey. Only one director helped member libraries use the standards to improve their services or hire more staff members. Additional ways in which the system standards were used are appended, along with the directors' explanations of how standards were used to improve their libraries' collections and services and how they were used in planning and evaluation.

Standards Helpfulness to Member Libraries

Only five of the system directors listed standards thought to be most helpful to their member libraries. Two left this question blank; one wrote "none," and one explained, "I cannot speak for them. I have helped them use the standards but they should tell you what has been useful for them." At least two directors listed each of the standards listed below as being

among the five most helpful to their member libraries. Again, the standards are arranged in descending order, followed by the percentage and number of directors that considered each among the most helpful. The wording of these standards is supplied immediately below the list for easy reference, and the directors' explanations of their choices are appended.

Standard Number	28	44%	(4)
Standard Number	35	33%	(3)
Standard Number	14	22%	(2)
Standard Number	32	22%	(2)
Standard Number	34	22%	(2)
Standard Number	39	22%	(2)

- #28 An Alabama public library will have at least as many volumes per capita for its population group
- #35 An Alabama public library will systematically reemove at least three percent of its collection each year.
- #14 An Alabama public library will be open at least as many hours per week as recommended ... for its population group.
- #32 An Alabama public library will have a circulation per capita as follows.
- #34 An Alabama public library will have collections of which at least 10% were published within the last five years.
- #39 An Alabama public library will have a basic reference collection as described in [the standard's] Appendix B.

The directors were also asked to list the numbers of the five standards they considered least helpful to their member libraries. Again, only five complied. Only two standards, standard three and standard seven, were chosen by at least two

(22*) of the directors as being among the least helpful to their member libraries. The wording of these two standards is supplied below, and the directors' explanations of their choices are appended.

- #3 An Alabama public library will have a percentage of the local community budget allocated for public library non-capital expenditures as follows.
- #7 The director of an Alabama public library will have educational preparation of the following levels or better....

Five of the system directors suggested areas for which public library standards should be added. These included: technology, on-line access to information, buildings, Americans with Disabilities Act, and children's and young adult services. A few general suggestions offered by the directors for the committee's consideration are appended.